

been attracting vultures in large numbers since 1998. The area is used by the municipality of Bikaner city for dumping carcasses (mostly cattle).

SK met with the species near Rupawas, Pali in the first week of February, 1998. About 60 birds were foraging on the ground and when disturbed they flew up on the trees "not like our pigeons (*Columba livia*) but like buntings." After the disturbance was over they came down again to the ground to feed.

On April 23, 1998 between 1100-1500 hours, at the border outpost of Kheruwala, Ganganagar, SK counted c. 100 birds on the "border lighting posts of the fence" spread over an area of several kilometres in groups of four or five.

There are two more recent records from Rajasthan. A local *shikari* saw "c. 60 *salara*" (*Columba eversmanni*) in January 2003 on the Gang Canal near Sri Ganganagar (Gurdip Singh pers. comm.). Three birds were seen in the Kadam Kunj area of Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur first on January 4,

1999 and then during the first week of March. Most of the time they were seen on a Kadamba *Anthocephalus cadamba* (Vibhu Prakash *in litt.* 2000). Incidentally, there is only one old record of the species from Bharatpur. Abdulali (1970) during a three day visit to Bharatpur in October 1951 saw the species "in pairs and parties of 15/20 in open"

While posted at Tonk, HSS was informed by Aziz-ul-Haq of the erstwhile Tonk family that up to 1970s the birds were sporadically shot during winter months in Tonk district. The species was so well recognized that it also had a local name. The local *shikaris* used to call it *pitkula*.

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### 13. ON THE SIGHTING OF THE LESSER COUCAL *CENTROPUS BENGALENSIS* IN THE ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS<sup>1</sup>

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During a recent bird watching program in the Andaman Islands a Coucal that fitted the description of the Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*, a previously unrecorded species in the Islands, was observed on April 5, 2004 close to No. 6 at Havelock Island. The bird was subsequently re-sighted the next day very briefly early in the morning. The bird that we sighted was smaller than the common Andaman Coucal *Centropus andamanensis*, and the Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* found commonly across India. It was black except for deep rusty brown/chestnut wings, with a burst of flight, typical of coucals observed as it crossed the road. It allowed us to stop and confirm our sighting, however, a photograph was

not possible within the short span of observation and also due to the heavy brush of the roadside where it had perched.

The only species of *Centropus* that have been recorded from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands include the endemic Andaman Coucal *Centropus andamanensis* (Grimmett *et al.* 1999), and sightings of a coucal species on Great Nicobar Island (Sivakumar 2000), which was possibly the Lesser Coucal (R. Sankaran pers. comm.). On a subsequent field visit in May 2004 to Little Andaman Island, a bird the size of the Andaman Coucal, but of the coloration of the mainland coucal, was spotted in the beach forest of South Bay (Totibue), Little Andaman Island.

Coucals, possibly other than the Andaman Coucal, have now been sighted at three widely separate locations in the islands. More sightings and other information are required to clarify whether the species is a vagrant or has colonized these islands. The Lesser Coucal is recorded, so far, from the Himalayan, north-eastern region and south-western regions of India, Bangladesh and south-eastern Asia, but not from the Islands in the Bay of Bengal. If this species is confirmed to be a resident of the archipelago it will add to the avifaunal diversity of the Islands and the geographic distribution of the species

itself. The other possibility includes colour variation within the species of Andaman Coucal ranging from its more frequently encountered colour of beige body with chestnut brown wings to the darker versions as described in this note.

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#### 14. SIGHTING OF STOLICZKA'S BUSHCHAT *SAXICOLA MACRORHYNCHUS* IN PUNE DISTRICT, MAHARASHTRA, WESTERN INDIA<sup>1</sup>

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Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhynchus* (Family: Muscipidae, Subfamily: Turdinae) is resident and rare locally, but not uncommon in some areas. It is confined to desert parts of Rajasthan and Kutch region of Gujarat. It occurs in sandy desert plains and scattered bushes. In this note I report sighting of this species from Pune district, Maharashtra, western India.

On December 22, 2004, a team of bird-watchers consisting of Advait Godbole, Parag Deshpande, Aditya Joshi, Hrishikesh Joshi and I, visited Varvand. This is a wetland surrounded by open, sparse scrub and stony wasteland, situated on the Pune-Solapur highway c. 60 km from Pune city. At 1500 hrs, we spotted a bird perched on a bush. The following distinguishing characters helped to identify the bird as Stoliczka's Bushchat: a distinct buffy-white supercilium, black bill, buffy underparts with white upper breast and throat, white patch on the inner greater coverts,

pale rump and white outer tail feathers. In some of the photographs we took, there is an indication of a small white patch on the inner greater coverts, suggesting that this was a first winter male.

This constitutes the first record of the species from Pune district, c. 600 km south of its usual range. The closest records, by Krys Kazmierczak, of the species are from Velavadar National Park, Gujarat. Humayun Abdulali's CHECKLIST OF BIRDS OF MAHARASHTRA (1973, BNHS) does not list this species. This observation, therefore, is significant, but the reason for this southern dispersal of the species is still unknown.

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#### 15. STATUS OF MUGGER *CROCODYLUS PALUSTRIS* IN SIMILIPAL TIGER RESERVE, ORISSA, INDIA<sup>1</sup>

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Of the 21 species of crocodylians that are found in the warm subtropical and tropical regions of the world, three

namely Gharial *Gavialis gangeticus*, the Saltwater or Estuarine Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus* and the Mugger *Crocodylus*